Faith & Inspiration

Burden of Choice

By Vincent V. Mashburn

In any orderly society, the intention of legal constraints is to curtail, as much as is possible and practical, activities which yield counterproductive and even destructive results for its members.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, we observe descriptions regarding believers and their roles and relationships with governing authorities and the law. Various passages in Scripture explain in detail the divine purpose of human government and what an effective Christian perspective ought to entail (Romans 131-7; Hebrews 13:17).

As the apostle Paul clarifies, we respect the laws of the land and those in positions of authority to enforce those laws out of our desire to honor and obey God himself, and not merely from fear of judgment or punishment.

Elsewhere in Scripture, we are reminded that God is concerned with whether our hearts are truly moved to pursue truth and righteousness (1 Samuel 16:7; Proverbs 21:2; Jeremiah 17:10; Matthew 5:8). Of course, we ultimately answer to the highest possible authority, that of God Almighty (Acts 5:29).

We also observe that the Bible does not blindly endorse every feasible legal system administered by human beings and readily acknowledges and identifies imperfections and flaws.

For instance, Jesus was critical of the Pharisees and what was essentially their idolatry of the law itself, whereby they practically deified the letter of the Torah (Mosaic law) and other traditions of religion above God's intention of blessing the world through his chosen people (Matthew 23). Again, Jesus was more interested in people's inner motivations and their willingness to serve as both recipients and channels of mercy and reconciliation with God.

Ideally, a legal system is intended to guide humanity in assembling an organized society that provides structure, safety, and support for mutual welfare. Any student of history and politics — and really, anyone with functioning senses — can conclude that just about any type of political system or government can be distorted or corrupted to a point where it subjugates rather than protects.

Moreover, there are undoubtedly ministries of state which begin with the best, most altruistic intentions but end up as onerous or overbearing as any despotic regime.

In an episode of the original "Star Trek" television series, the crew of the starship USS Enterprise investigate a planet hosting the remnant of a civilization which bears a striking resemblance to late 19th century Earth. The members of this civilization exhibit some rather peculiar behavior: generally aimless and mindlessly contented, they periodically experience seemingly spontaneous but deliberately scheduled outbursts of unruly, chaotic, even violent incivility.

(This is actually reminiscent of some real-world religions which designate institutionally endorsed or mandated periods of self-indulgence, excess, and even licentious conduct.)

Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock, Doctor McCoy, and the other members of the landing party attempt to avoid interacting with the revelers and take shelter at a nearby boarding house. The mayhem continues throughout the evening and abruptly ends the following morning at what appears to be another predetermined time, with the participants seemingly unfazed.

Kirk and party are then approached by a couple of robed individuals identified as "lawgivers" who express disapproval that the visitors did not attend the so-called "festival" of the previous evening. The lawgivers announce that the landing party will undergo a treatment to be absorbed into the "Body" — presumably indicating the whole of this society — while making reference to someone or something called "Landru," implying a source of authority.

Unsurprisingly and understandably, the landing party members attempt to resist this forceful assimilation of sorts. Kirk openly defies the lawgivers in an effort to gauge their response.

LAWGIVER: You have heard the Word and disobeyed. You will be absorbed.

KIRK: What do you mean, absorbed?

LAWGIVER: You will be absorbed. The Good is all. Landru is gentle. You will come.

KIRK: We're not going anywhere.

LAWGIVER: It is the law. You must come.

KIRK: I said we're not going anywhere.

It is ultimately discovered that "Landru" is a computer programmed to govern this society by a man named Landru several millennia ago. The machine had concluded that the best parameters for an ideal civilization were enforced contentment through strict adherence to regulated behavior with recurring outlets for primal impulses — and absolutely no capacity for independent decisions on the part of those being overseen thusly. Kirk and Spock confront the Landru computer to convince it of the error of its ways.

KIRK: What is the good?

...

LANDRU: The good is the harmonious continuation of the Body. The good is peace, tranquility. The good of the Body is the directive.

KIRK: Then I put it to you that you have disobeyed the Prime Directive. You are harmful to the Body.

LANDRU: The body is. It exists. It is healthy.

KIRK: The body is dying. You are destroying it. ... What have you done to do justice to the full potential of every individual of the Body?

LANDRU: Insufficient data.

KIRK: Without freedom of choice, there is no creativity. Without creativity, there is no life. The body dies. The fault is yours.

SPOCK: Are you aiding the body, or are you destroying it?

LANDRU: I am not programmed to answer that question.

...

KIRK: Landru, answer the question.

LANDRU: Peace, order, and tranquility are maintained. The body lives, but I reserve creativity to me.

SPOCK: Then the body dies. Creativity is necessary for the health of the Body.

In the end, in typical logical fashion, the Landru computer concludes that it is, in fact, causing more harm to humanity than good and so self-destructs. The denizens of this world are now free to discover the path to virtue without threat or obligation or external imperative. Self-determination and autonomy can sometimes be more challenging than any autocracy.

The apostle Paul's exhortation is that "your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion, but of your own free will" (Philemon 1:14). God does not merely desire that we “do good”; he wants us to WANT to do good for good reasons — namely, in order to manifest his love and grace to all, rather than out of fear of retribution or as a means to oppress or burden others in order to somehow elevate ourselves.

Jesus even implored us to exchange the burden of the weight of the law for his much lighter burden of salvation by unmerited grace through his redeeming sacrifice (Matthew 11:28-30). Our burden of choice distills into the options of deferring to be defined by a legalism so severe we can never satisfy its stipulations; or embracing a grace which relieved our debt incurred by sin. We are blessed with the opportunity described in Joshua 24:15 to "choose for yourselves today whom you will serve."

Lifestyle

Music To Share at Community Center

The young men of HSG (Humble Servants of God) continue to develop their musical ability under the direction of founder and mentor Kenney Cenat.

Photograph provided by Kenney Cenat.

By Charlie Hudson

The William Dickinson Community Center in Homestead has been the site of many events, and on August 23 it was host to a lively evening with the “Back2School” Concert sponsored by Homestead Council member Jenifer Bailey.

The prompt to, “Kick Off The School Year With A Night Of Music, Worship & Fellowship”, came with a lot of enthusiasm and talent.

In March of this year, the group, Humble Servants of God (HSG), made their first public appearance on stage in Losner Park as part of the Carnival of the Arts.

With the new school year underway, Kenney Cenat, an Assistant Principal at South Dade Senior High School, is proud of the group of young men he is leading in music as well as mentoring.

“Before becoming an Assistant Principal, I was a musician myself and had the privilege of playing with Zenglen, one of the most well-known Haitian bands,” he previously explained.

“My journey began playing in church, which inspired me to form this group to keep young boys engaged, off the streets and doing something positive while helping them develop their God-given talents.”

He's continuing to complete steps toward obtaining recognition as a 501(c)3 non-profit and knows the effort is worthwhile.

“I've witnessed firsthand the powerful impact of mentorship through HSG. Many of the young men I work with have grown and continue to grow into confident leaders, showing discipline in the classroom, commitment to their studies, and pride in their accomplishments.

For example, one student who once struggled with focus as a Junior in high school now balances playing music with excelling in school — while maintaining a part time job as a senior in high school — consistently earning good grades, and setting a strong example for his peers. Watching them transform into role model citizens dedicated to their education, talents, and communities has been one of the most rewarding parts of this journey.”

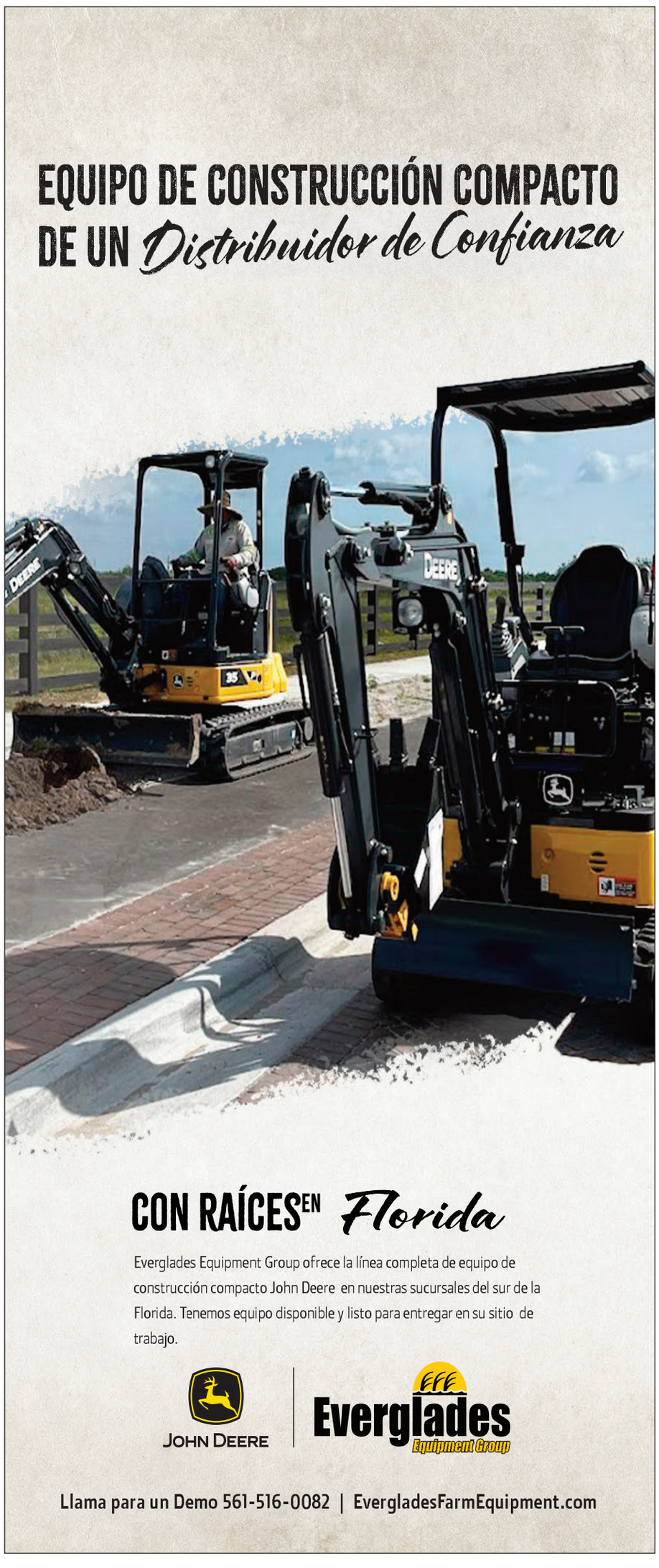
Frantz Louissant, who was on hand to serve as DJ, said he’s seen the group since the beginning: members are from the Haitian Evangelical Church of Homestead and other churches.

“The best thing is they sing positively and they help present God to the community,” he said.

Christine Joseph, a student at Miami-Dade College and member of the Ebenezer Christian Church Homestead, has been with the Ebenezer Angels dancers for sixteen years.

She and five others, ready in their gold and red costumes, were another part of the evening’s offerings, and although they perform lyrical and hip-hop, their focus was “Praise Dancing”, a method of showing their love of the Lord through dance.

If the evening was an indication of the coming school year, everyone is starting in good spirits.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